TraMod TALKS with Japanese Architect Ryota Matsumoto | The Shared Mnemonic Nature of Tradition can evoke an Awareness of Time

Read Javad Eiraji`s Exclusive Interview with Japanese Architect Ryota Matsumoto

Ryota Matsumoto is an artist, educator, and architect based in New York and Tokyo. As a media theorist, he is regarded as the forefather of the post-digital art and architecture movements. Born in Tokyo, he was raised in Hong Kong and Japan. He received a Master of Architecture degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 2007 after his studies at the Architectural Association in London and Mackintosh School of Architecture, the Glasgow School of Art in the early 90s. Over the years, he has studied with Manuel DeLanda, Vincent Joseph Scully Jr., Cecil Balmond, and Giancarlo De Carlo, among others. Matsumoto has collaborated with a cofounder of the Metabolist Movement, Kisho Kurokawa, and with Arata Isozaki, Peter Christopherson, and MIT Media Lab

As a designer and consultant for Nihon Seikei Inc. and Japanese railway, he has worked on high-profile projects including Kyushu University Ito Campus masterplan (2003-2005), Shinjuku redevelopment project in Tokyo (2009-2012), Bach Mai Hospital in Hanoi (2000), and Qingdao mixed-use development in China (2011). Matsumoto has presented his work on multidisciplinary design, visual culture, and urbanism at the 5th symposium of the Imaginaries of the Future at Cornell University, the Espaciocenter workshop at TEA Tenerife Espacio de las Artes, Oslo National Academy of the Arts, UCI Claire Trevor School of the Arts, iDMAa Conference 2017, Network Media Culture Symposium at Machida Museum of Graphic Arts, and NTT InterCommunication Center as a literary critic and curator

Javad Eiraji: Would you please share a short biography of yourself and your firm with us

Ryota Matsumoto: I started out as a practicing architect mainly involved in urban planning and civic building design. I spent several years in Vietnam and China supervising various redevelopment projects that were under construction. Currently, I manage my own studio and also work as an academic, teaching interdisciplinary design and visual arts

Javad Eiraji: How do you see the contemporary architecture of the world? Is there an interaction between tradition and modernity in today's architecture? What do architects/designers pay attention to

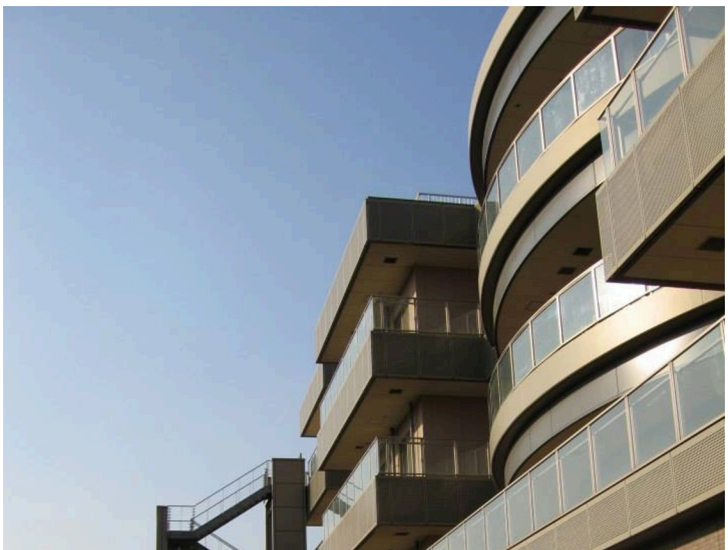
Ryota Matsumoto: The proliferation of digital media has led to a society that is increasingly focused on the accumulation and dissemination of information rather than on the cultivation of knowledge. With the multiple data streams and ubiquitous network connectivity, information is instantaneously available and omnipresent. This trend is leading toward an entropic form of technological consumerism, and eventually, could cause the technological instability of ethical life built on the co-evolutionary process with an epiphylogenetic memory. In that context, I regard local culture as the reappraisal of the exteriorization process involving noetic activity to overcome the increasing loss of spiritual individuation caused by successive phases of technological remediation. The shared mnemonic nature of tradition can evoke an awareness of time that opens the possibility of retention–pretention and ultimately deep attention to cultural transmission. Hence, tradition as a form of knowledge culture can disrupt the generalized polarization of the consumer's existence and reinstate humans as autonomous individuals in the contemporary network of human–non-human relationships

Javad Eiraji: Is it needed to use the past in today's architecture and design? Is it related to identity? How can we do this mission

Ryota Matsumoto: In the realm of design thinking, the past is not simply the chronological sequence of historical events. Instead, I regard the past as the intermediary agency consisting of the accumulated knowledge, experience, and cultural heritage that is transmitted across generations through the adaptation of technology as collective memory. In that respect, the past as the memory machine of tradition is not a fixed or static spatio-temporal entity but rather a constantly evolving and dynamic flux of pre-individual potentialities intertwined with a metastable agency. As Bernard Stiegler argues, our relationship to the past is essential to our ability to navigate the present and the future, and our employment of technology is a crucial factor in concretizing such techno-human relations. The advent of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the way that the past, as a form of collective memory, is transmitted and received, and we need to develop new ways of engaging with the past in the digital age. Overall, I perceive the notion of the past as a complex and dynamic phenomenon that is deeply interwoven with the epigenetic memory of technology and the broader socio-cultural contexts in which it is embedded

Javad Eiraji: Have you any project (built or unbuilt) which interaction between tradition and modernity can be seen in it

Ryota Matsumoto: The Ito Sustainable Water Treatment Plant located in the Kyushu prefecture in the west region of Japan certainly encapsulates both realms I mentioned in response to previous questions considering the intertextual relationship between collective memory and technology. Despite being a short-term project confined within the preconfigured context of the built site, the project reflects the scale, degree of density, and inter-objectivity of urban space as a multivalent nexus of urban experiences, indigenous traits, and socio-economic conjunctures



Javad Eiraji: Do you think this kind of design thinking (tradition + modernity) can be focused in academic studies and educations? Is it needed for today's architecture in our society

Ryota Matsumoto: Considering the progress of our collective individuation as social entities through technological advancement in the last 10 years or so, I believe that knowledge creation and its dissemination will continue to be shaped by a multivalent interplay of sociocultural and techno-pharmacological agents through our interaction with technical artifacts. This includes the way in which we create, share, and transmit knowledge about both tradition and modernity across generations as well as the underlying technologies that we use to facilitate the externalization of collective memory as tertiary retentions. One area of interest for me is the impact of digital technologies on collective memory and the ways in which we construct narratives about the past in the academic realm. With the rise of social media and other participatory platforms, we are seeing a multi-literacies approach to engaging with historical memory that challenges traditional modes of archival practices and documentation. Rather than relying on a few authoritative sources to construct a historical narrative, people are able to share their personal stories and experiences with others, creating a rich tapestry of historical memory shaped by a diverse range of perspectives through participatory media. In short, everyone is able to contribute to the externalization of collective memory from the mnemonic capabilities of networked mediation. I am fascinated by the new modes of engaging with historical memory in academic studies and how they pave the way for more inclusive and sustainable representations of sociocultural artifacts. Our understanding of the past is not only formulated by the content of historical narratives but also by the technological context in which they are presented as epiphylogenetic constructs in the educational environment

Javad Eiraji: Which factors (forms, meaning, function, user) must be studied in combination of tradition and modernity in architecture

Ryota Matsumoto: The study of tradition and modernity in architectural education requires a multifaceted and transversal approach that takes into account a broad range of heterogeneous factors related to the underlying substructure of the socio-cultural activities. There are some crucial factors that should be considered. First, architecture is not confined within the preconceived notion of place-temporality; it also encompasses the collective individuation of socio-cultural milieus. The study of tradition and modernity in architectural education should explore the techno-cultural morphology of epiphylogenesis and how they relate to the social, political, and economic contexts in which they were created. Second, the study of tradition and modernity in architectural education should consider how the spatio-temporal attributes of place-making and design have evolved over time. This encompasses the study of how tradition is inextricably related to the local cultures in the sociocultural context and how modern architecture embraces the empirical process of the technical maieutics. Finally, architecture is ultimately prescribed to create a spatial experience in a symbiotic relationship with humans, and the study of tradition and modernity in architectural education should consider how different modalities of spatial semiotics have been incorporated and experienced by heterogeneous local cultures. This includes the study of how traditional architecture is formulated to meet the ethnographic convention-ambience of specific communities and how modern architecture is designated to accommodate the cultural multiplicity of increasingly diverse and globalized assemblages.By incorporating the above-mentioned factors into one's academic studies, one can develop and explore transversality in the modes of thought and expression that are immanent in the creative synergy between tradition and modernity, thereby fostering a holistic and inclusive approach toward architecture that is both sustainable and contextually respectful of cultural heritage

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